Benj. Gaskell

C R Haines

1479 bb 2

NARRATIVE, &c.

1799

THE REAL EMBALMED HEAD

OF

OLIVER CROMWELL

NOW EXHIBITING

IN ARGYLL-COURT, IN OLD BOND-STREET.

1799.

in possession of the Head, the engraving is reversed

NARRATIVE

RELATING TO

THE REAL EMBALMED HEAD

OF

OLIVER CROMWELL,

[Appendix]

NOW EXHIBITING

IN MEAD-COURT, IN OLD BOND-STREET.

1799.

NARRATIVE

OF

THE REMARKABLE PALMED HEAD

OF

OLIVER CROMWELL,

NOW EXHIBITING

AT MEAD'S COURT, IN OLD BOND-STREET.

1799.

NARRATIVE, &c.

OLIVER, the second son of Robert Cromwell, esquire, of Huntingdon, by his wife Elizabeth, the daughter of William Steward, esquire, of the city of Ely; was born in the parish of St. John's, in the town of Huntingdon, on the 25 April 1599—was inaugurated protector on the 12 Dec. 1653—died at Whitehall palace, aged 60, on the 3 Sept. 1658—and was buried, with "more than regal *" honors, in Henry the Seventh's chapel, in Westminster Abbey.

After the restoration, viz. in January 1661, the bodies of Oliver Cromwell, his son in law Henry Ireton (who had been lord deputy of Ireland) and John Bradshaw, who as president of the pretented high court of justice, had pronounced sentence of death on King Charles the First, were, by a vote of the house of commons (passed on the 8 Dec. 1660) taken out of their graves, by John Lewis, a mason; as appears by his receipt as follows:—

* Cowley.

"May the 4th day 1661, rec. then in full of the "worshipfull Sargeant Norfolke † fiveteen shillings for "taking up the corpes of Cromell and Ireton & Brasaw "rec. by mee.

JOHN LEWIS"

The coffins containing the bodies of Cromwell and Ireton were taken up on Saturday the 26 January 1660, and on the Monday night following, were drawn in two several carts from Westminster Abbey, to the Red Lion Inn, in Holborn, where they remained all night: Bradshaw was not taken up until the morning following; and on the anniversary of King Charles's death, (30 Jannary 1660) all the three coffins were conveyed upon sledges to Tyburn, and the bodies there taken out, and hanged at the three several angles of the gallows until sunset. They were then beheaded, the trunks thrown into a deep pit under the gallows, and the heads set upon poles on the top of Westminster hall. It is likely enough that the decapitation was performed in haste, and in the midst of tumult and confusion, which may also account for the nose being broke in, and for the head's having been separated from the body by two distinct, irregu-

† Supposed to be of the Herald's office.

lar blows (the first somewhat high in the neck) the marks of which blows indicate the natural and certain appearances of their having been applied to a subject that had been sometime dead, and preserved from dissolution by artificial means.

It's being so well preserved to the time of it's falling from the top of Westminster hall, is sufficiently accounted for by the known fact of the whole body and head having been carefully and elaborately embalmed; but especially, by Mr. Sainthill's MS. quoted in Noble's memoirs, vol. 1, p. 290; in which MS. the author mentions his being an *eye-witness* of the state of the bodies; and that Cromwell's "was in green cere-cloth, very fresh embalmed."

The tradition respecting the head of Oliver Cromwell is, that being on a stormy night, in the latter end of the reign of Charles, or James the second, blown off from the top of Westminster hall, it was taken up by one of those many persons whom the flagitious conduct of these monarchs, had by that time converted to a less unfavorable opinion of Cromwell: By this person it was soon after presented to one of the Russell family; and in the possession of one branch or another of that family, it remained many years, until the

last possessor of it, of that name (Mr. Samuel Russell) sold it to James Cox, esquire, formerly proprietor of the celebrated museum which bore his name. The head was first seen by Mr. Cox about the year 1780, when exhibited, as well as he recollects, somewhere not far from Claremarket. On that occasion Mr. Cox first became acquainted with Russell, who then possessed the head as his property; and who, being in indigent circumstances, requested Mr. Cox, to assist him with money for his support; which, partly from humanity, and partly (he confesses) with a view to the acquisition, sometime or other, of so great a curiosity, Mr. Cox from time to time did, till the 30 April 1787; when, in consideration of upwards of 100l. which had been advanced, and a considerable sum then paid down, Russell, by a legal deed, transferred the head to Mr. Cox. That gentleman having since retired from business and from town, has lately sold it to the present proprietors.

Mr. Cox, whose laudable attention to curious subjects is well known, says that having acquired a legal title to the head, though at the expence of so much money and of seven years patience in waiting for Russell to make up his mind to part with it, (which he did *at last* with infinite re-

hicrance) he, from that time, purposely concealed it, even from his own family, in order to prevent the trouble of those incessant applications which he conceived would be made for a sight of it, in case it should be publicly known that he possessed so extraordinary and interesting a curiosity. And so very tenacious was he of this resolution, that he even denied the request of the late Mr. Alderman Wilkes, with whom he was well acquainted, and who being at the Globe Tavern in Fleet Street, with a party of friends, sent a deputation to Mr. Cox, expressly for that purpose.

It may be noticed that one of the *ears* is wanting; and that there have been some other slight mutilations. This is accounted for by another of the family traditions, which is, that when the protector's relations and admirers, were occasionally admitted to see the head, they took those opportunities to pilfer such small parts as could best be come at, or were least likely to be missed: The *ear* is said to have been taken away by one of the Russells of Fordham.

The Russell family of Cambridgeshire, appears to have been allied to that of Cromwell, by no less than three distinct marriages, within the space of twenty years, viz.

1st. the marriage of the protector Oliver's youngest daughter Frances, the widow of Rob. Rich, with colonel Sir John Russell, Bart. of Chippenham, distinguished for his gallantry at the battle of Marston moor.

2d. the marriage of the protector Oliver's son, the great and good Henry Cromwell (deputy of Ireland) with Elizabeth the sister of the said Sir John Russell; and

3d. the marriage of Elziabeth, the daughter of the said Henry Cromwell, with William Russell, esquire; of Fordham; by whom she had seven sons and six daughters, and after having nearly ruined her fortunes by extravagant expences, died in London in 1711.

From this last mentioned alliance, *Samuel Russell* is said to have been descended. At the time of his treaty with Mr. Cox, he resided in Keppel Street, Southwark; was afterwards servant to a broker; and since thought to be living near Spital Fields; but in an obscurity which has hitherto eluded every endeavour to find him out. The greatest probability is that he is dead.

The history of the head, from the period when it was first deposited with the Russell family, to the time of its coming into the possession of Samuel Russell, is not, for the present, attempted to be more particularly given. It has been hinted that, by some concealment, or other indirect practice, the title of some of Samuel Russell's predecessors to the property of this head, was not quite *regular*. The remoteness of such a transaction would render it wholly immaterial whether this report were true or false, on any other account than this, that it is certainly no mean evidence of the authenticity and value of a thing, that it was worth the risque of stealing, or of fraudulently concealing it. And here it may not be impertinent to observe that one of the many circumstances of fact which have established the identity of the head exhibited, is, that of Cromwell's having been the only instance known of a head cut off and spiked *that had* before *been embalmed*, which is precisely the case with respect to the head in question.

It appears by papers delivered by Mr. Cox, to the present proprietors, with the head, that in the year 1775, the learned and ingenious Doctor Southgate, late librarian to the British Museum, had been applied to for his opinion of its

identity; and that after a very attentive consideration of it for twenty minutes, and comparing it with medals, coins &c. he had delivered his opinion in these words—"gentlemen you may be assured that this is the real head of Oliver Cromwell."

The celebrated medallist Mr. Kirk, gave his opinion in writing, as follows.

"The head shewn to me for Oliver Cromwell's, I verily believe to be his real head; as I have carefully examined it with the coin, and think the outline of the face exactly corresponds with it, so far as remains. The nostril, which is still to be seen, inclines downwards as it does in the coin the cheek bone seems to be as it is engraved, and the color of the hair is the same as one well copied from an original painting by Cooper in his time.

JOHN KIRK.

Bedford Street Covent Garden, 1775."

To these among other suffrages from the most eminent virtuosi of the age, the proprietors have the satisfaction to add, that of the very learned and respectable DOCTOR

COMBE; and they submit the facts and matter here adduced as abundantly sufficient to establish a rational conviction that the head exhibited, is the identical head of

OLIVER CROMWELL,

in his time the most intrepid and victorious general, the most sagacious statesman and the most powerful sovereign, in Europe: A man, on whose stupendous character and actions, all the industry of research, all the energies of history, and all the splendors of eloquence, have been exhausted. Who could inspire the most abstruse of all philosophers with *poetry*, and the sublimest of all poets, with *politics*—the most proud and warlike nations upon earth with humility and dread, the whole world with respect and admiration; and who at last, yielding only to *death*, left behind him a name which cannot be extinguished but in that oblivion which shall bury the memory of all human actions.

Locke. † Milton.

? where in his works

NOTES

respecting the exhibited dies for a medal ordered by the parliament of the commonwealth of England, in honor of Cromwell's great victory at Dunbar, on the 3 of Sep. 1650.

"The engraver of these admirable dies, Thomas Simon, a Yorkshire man, who was formed in England by Briot, a French medallist, rivalled the classic masters of antiquity. All the capital works of Simon were executed during the protectorate of the Cromwells."

Granger Vol. 3. p. 137.

Soon after the restoration, Simon was dismissed from the mint, to make room for the Rotiers (three brothers, foreigners): upon which Simon engraved his famous crown-piece for Charles the second, with the following petition round the edge of it.

"Thomas Simon most humbly prays your Majesty to compare this his trial piece with the Dutch, and if more truly drawn and embossed, more gracefully ordered, and more accurately engraven, to relieve him."

This beautiful specimen of his skill, recovered his salary. It certainly would not have been unnatural, if Simon, who for so many years had devoted his talents to blazon the

glories of an usurped government, had been obnoxious to the restored prince; yet it is not unlikely, as DOCTOR COMBE observes (see Vertue's Simon, edited by Nicholls) that the Rotiers were put in, rather to *expedite* the public business at the mint, than to *supplant* an artist of so evident and transcendent abilities: Neither Dryden, Waller, nor Sprat, nor a hundred others, were punished for having *celebrated* the usurper; and even Milton was spared, who had gone *greater lengths* than any of them; who, not contenting himself with a mere *approval* of the usurper, had exerted the whole force of his genius and learning in a public attempt to *justify the killing* of his sovereign.

The Dunbar medals, of which the original dies are exhibited, are the first in the twelfth plate of the works of Thomas Simon, engraved and described by George Vertue: The following is Vertue's account of them.

"PLATE XII. An oval medal in silver, of general Cromwell, (A) a profile;—under the shoulder, Thomas Simon f. The motto about the head.

Word at Dunbar } Septem. The lord of hosts. the 3 1650.

Behind the head, a prospect of the battle: The reverse is

the house of commons sitting. This medal, it is thought, was struck by Oliver's own appointment, being the first drawn for him from the life, by Simon, and is *remarkable for the likeness* when lieutenant general, as appears by comparing it with a picture of him drawn by Walker, his painter about that time. The minute representation of the house of commons on the reverse of this medal, is very extraordinary; but was still more so on the reverse of the *lesser medal*, which reverse has unfortunately been destroyed, as hereafter mentioned.

"Both these medals (continues Vertue) are frequently seen in silver, and *sometimes in gold*; and when fairly struck, and well preserved, do great honor to the ingenious artist. The dye of the larger one was kept in the family; for there was a house in the county of Hants (Hursley, about four miles from Winchester) where the protector Richard once lived, which being purchased by the late Sir William Heathcote, this dye was found in the walls."

The parliament seal of the commonwealth was also found there; which according to Vertue, Sir William sold for a *roman weight*. It was very rusty; but being cleaned Vertue, who saw it in the year 1741, rationally concluded

it to be the very seat that Oliver took away from one of those parliaments which (as his adversary Cowley expressed it) "he could call together by the sword of his pen, and dis-"perse with the breath of his mouth."

Copy of a letter, by which it appears that Simon was sent down to Edinburgh to take Oliver's directions for making the identical dyes now exhibited.

"For the honoble comittee for the army these:

Gentl.

It was not a little wonder to me to see that you shoa send Mr Symonds so great a journey about a business importing so little as far as it relates to me, when as if my poor opinion may not be rejected by yr I have to offer to that which I think the most noble end, to wit, a comemoracon of that great mercie at Dunbar, & the gratitude of the army which might better be expressed upon the meddal by engraving as on the one side the parliamt which I heare was intended & will do singularly well, so on the other side an army wth this inscription over the head of it *The lord of hosts* wch was o' word that day: wherefore if I

may beg it as a favo^r from you I most earnestly beseech you if I may do it without offence that it may be soe, & if you think not fitt to have it as I offer, you may alter it as you see cause only I do think I may truely say it will be verie thankfully acknowledged by me if you will spare the having my effigies in it.

The gentleman's paynes & trouble hither have been verie great, & I shall make it my second suit unto you that you will please to confer upon him that employment in your service which *Nicholas Briot*‡ had before him, indeed the man is ingenious and worthie of encouragem^t. I may not presume much, but if at my request & for my sake he may obtayne this favo^r I shall putt it upon the accompt of my obligacons w^ch are not a few & I hope shall be found readie gratefully to acknowledge & to approve myself, gentl.

Yo^r most reall serv^t

Edinburgh 4th of Febr 1656.*

O. CROMWELL.

‡ In the original this name is inserted in another hand.

* Edinburgh Castle, which had never before yielded to a conqueror, had been taken by Cromwell about a month before.

The original of the above letter was in the possession of John Raymond esquire, at Fairford in Gloucestershire; and was first published in Doctor Harris's appendix to his Historical and critical account of Oliver Cromwell; and see Vertues Simon, p. 73.

Of the two dyes now exhibited and here spoken of, the accurate and spirited expression of parts so uncommonly minute, the singular beauty of the heads, and their exact likeness both to the original, and to each other (of which latter felicity, it has been asserted that there is no equal instance in the history of this art) sufficiently prove their *authenticity*; it only remains to say, that they were found, near fifty years ago, by Mr. Thomas Gardner, comptroller of the salt-works at Southwold in Suffolk, in the shop of a blacksmith at that place, who asserted that he, or his father, had purchased them (with other articles of iron work) out of a house at Southwold that had belonged to the protector Richard. Vertue's account of their having been found at Hursley *may* therefore be erroneous; but it is not at all material to the subject. This *unlucky* fellow, wholly ignorant of the nature and value of those exquisite monuments both of art and of the English history, had already appropriated

the reverse of the lesser dye, to make one of those steel instruments with which iron is divided on the anvil. Mr. Gardner instantly rescued all the parts which remained; and on one of his annual journies to London, presented them to Mr. Cox, on condition that the latter should occasionally furnish him with impressions from them. Mr. Gardner was then far advanced in years, and died soon after, when but a very few of the impressions engaged by Mr. Cox had been taken; and it is now more than twenty years since the dyes were used, at all, except for a few impressions from the remaining obverse side of the smaller one. It has already been shewn from Vertue's opinion that these medals exhibit the best likenesses of Cromwell, that have ever been obtained in this mode of imitation.

The late Mr. Pingo, engraver to the mint, out of a generous regard to the arts, undertook to inclose both parts of the larger dye, at his own expence, in a strong iron frame, in order to its greater safety, and better preservation; and it was done accordingly, in the manner in which it now appears.